

Creating a New Nation: The Founding Fathers Fight Over the Meaning of America





Hector St. Jean de Crèvecoeur

Crisis After the Revolution

- A loosely organized nation whose citizens had weak loyalties to the nation
- An extremely weak central “government”
 - Could not effectively negotiate with other nations
- A severe economic crisis
- Social upheaval including a major rebellion in Massachusetts

The Constitutional Convention

- The convention convened in May of 1787 in Philadelphia ostensibly to revise the Articles of Confederation.
- Twelve states sent 55 delegates (Rhode Island did not.).
 - Some of the most elite members of American society.
- The delegates quickly agreed to write a whole new frame of government.
 - A primary goal was to stop what they saw as abuses by the state and the threats of anarchy emanating from “the people.”
 - Some have argued that this was a “counter-revolutionary” moment.
 - How did they have the authority to do this?

A Political Compromise

- Areas of agreement
 - The government would have three branches.
 - Congress would have the power to raise taxes.
 - The power of the states would be limited.
 - States would not be allowed to take a variety of actions national elites deemed harmful.
 - The federal government would be “supreme.”
 - The government would represent “the people” and NOT the states
- Areas of disagreement
 - The proper balance of large vs. small states
 - Large states wanted representation by population.
 - Small states wanted representation by state.
 - Compromise: The House of Representatives would have proportional representation and the Senate would have equal representation.
 - Slavery
 - Most wanted it unmentioned and unprotected.
 - Deep South delegates wanted explicit protections.
 - Compromise: Slavery was not explicitly mentioned but received several protections.

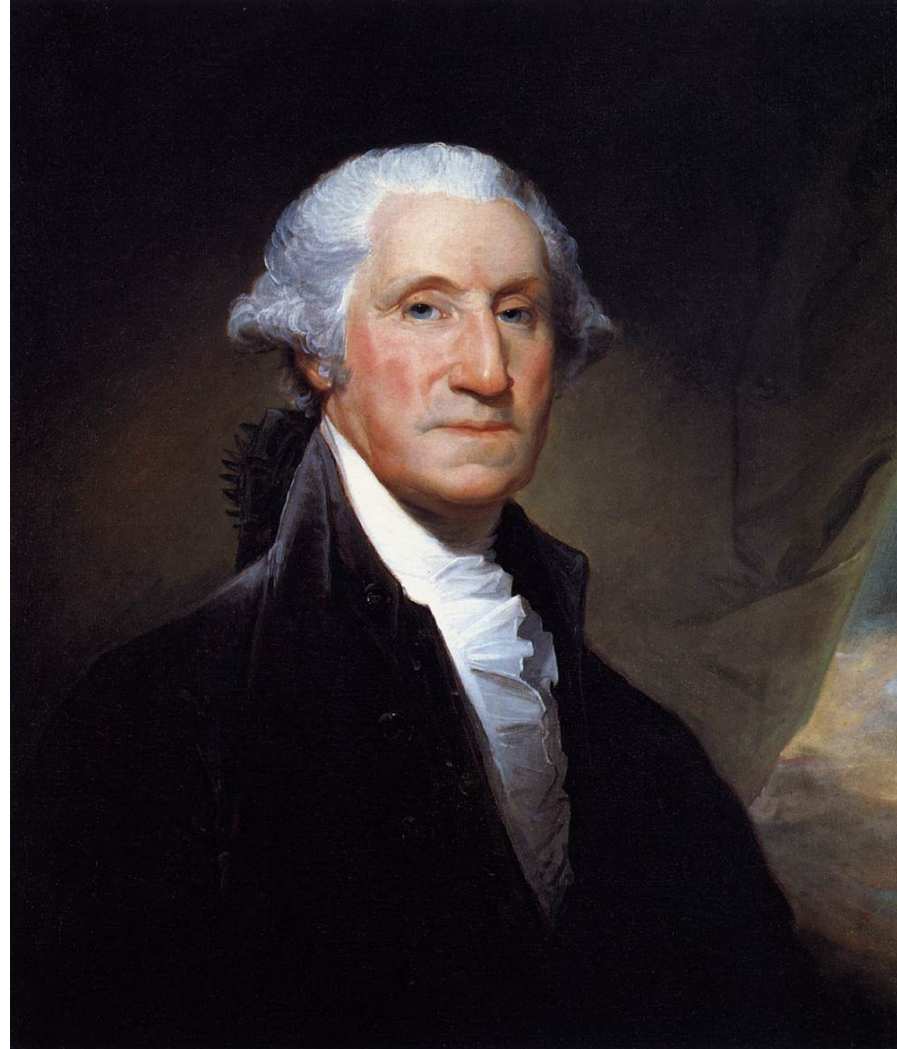
The Anti-Federalists

- Opposed the adoption of the Federal Constitution
- Who?
 - Prominent state politicians
 - Small farmers who supported debt relief
 - Revolutionary radicals
 - Opponents AND supporters of slavery
- They argued that
 - The Constitution would inevitably lead to the decline of liberty and the growth of government power.
 - Only small communities could be effective Republics.
 - It needed a Bill of Rights.
- Main legacy was the Bill of Rights



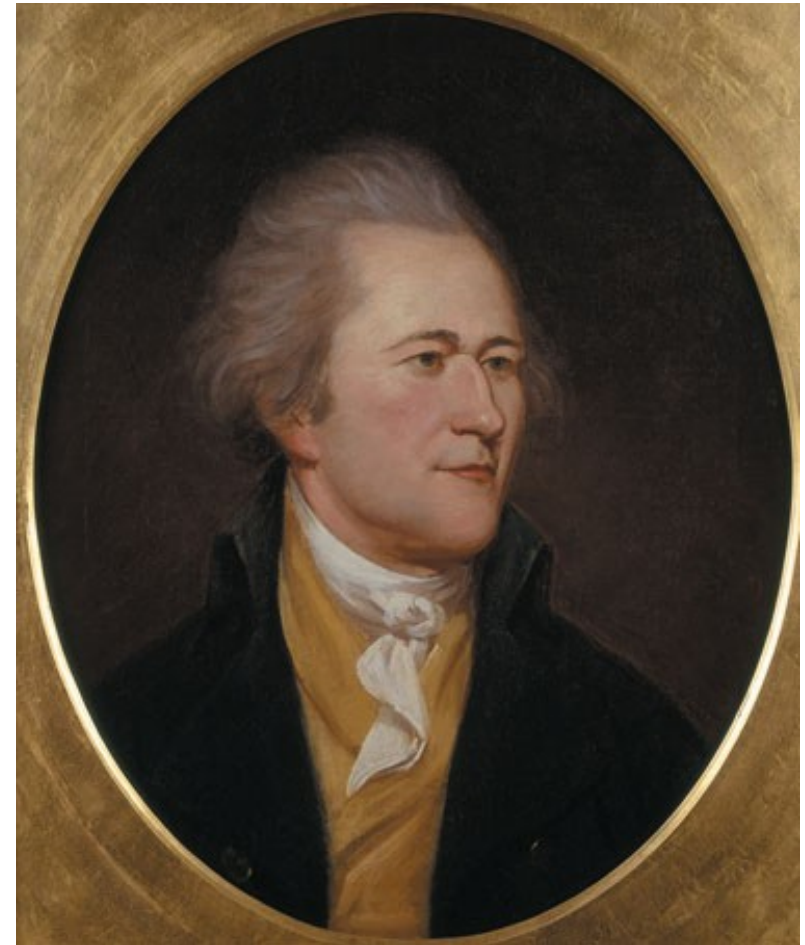
Patrick Henry – A prominent Anti-Federalist

The New Government



The Reports on Public Credit and Manufactures

- Early conflicts centered around the powers and ends of the federal government.
- The focus was Alexander Hamilton's ideas for how to assist government finances and the economy.
- Hamilton wrote two reports in 1790 and 1791 laying out his plans.
 - Report on Public Credit
 - Report on Manufactures



Interpreting the Constitution

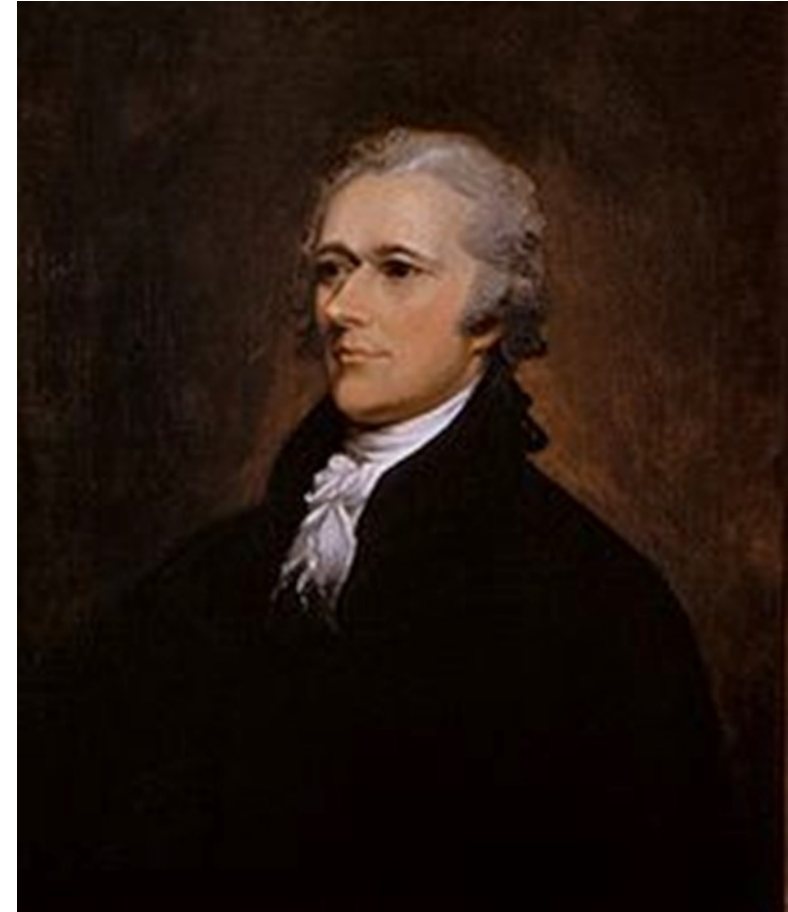
- The “Framers” disagreed about what the Constitution meant.
- Hamilton argued that the “general welfare” clause of the Constitution supported expansive federal powers.
 - “The Congress shall have Power To lay and collect Taxes, Duties, Imposts and Excises, to pay the Debts and provide for the common Defence and **general Welfare** of the United States.”
- Opponents took a “strict constructionist” view and argued that the Federal government could only act in ways explicitly stated in the Constitution.
 - “The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people.”
- These different visions of federal power have often structured disagreements ever since.

Disputes over Foreign Affairs

- By the mid-1790s, Americans were “taking sides” for or against the French Revolution.
- Jay’s Treaty
 - A treaty signed with Great Britain in 1794.
 - Britain agreed to withdraw its troops from American territory in the West.
 - Britain received very favorable trade terms.
 - Britain did not agree to stop seizing American ships and sailors
- Americans divided in their interpretation of Jay’s Treaty.

The First Party System: The Federalists

- Supported Washington's administration.
- Favored Hamilton's economic program and economic ties with Britain.
- Supported an expansive interpretation of federal powers.
 -
- Elitists
 - Society should be hierarchical and public office should be for the elite.
 - Freedom rested on deference to authority.

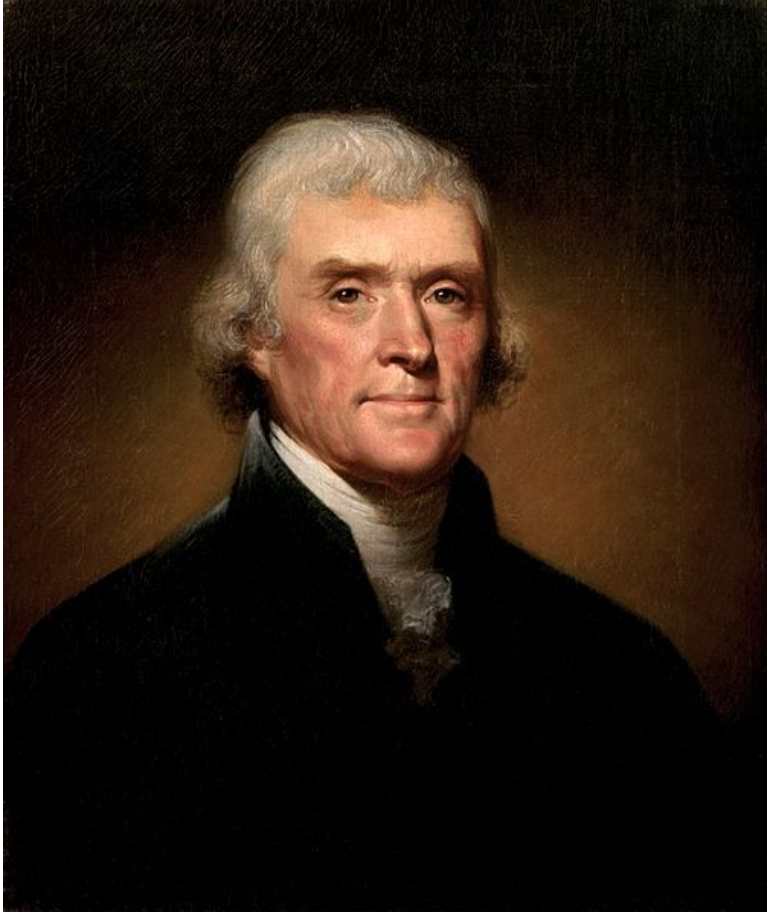


The First Party System: The Republicans

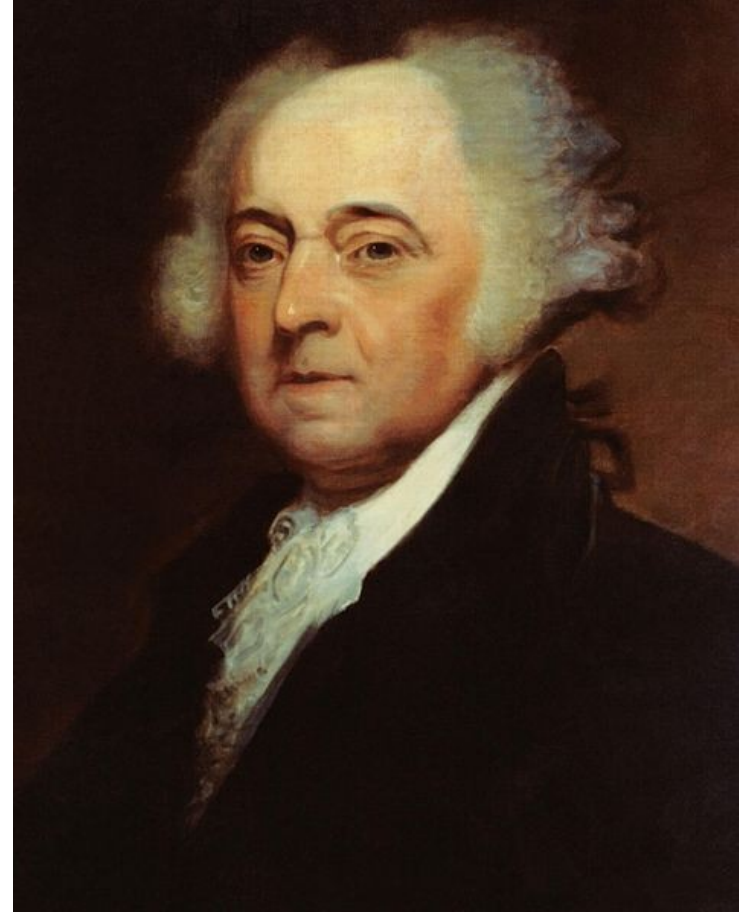
- Opposed Washington's administration.
- Led by Thomas Jefferson.
- Sympathized with France and had faith in democratic self-government.
- Supported a “strict constructionist” interpretation of the Constitution.
- More egalitarian and accepted broad, ongoing democratic participation.



The Election of 1796



Thomas Jefferson

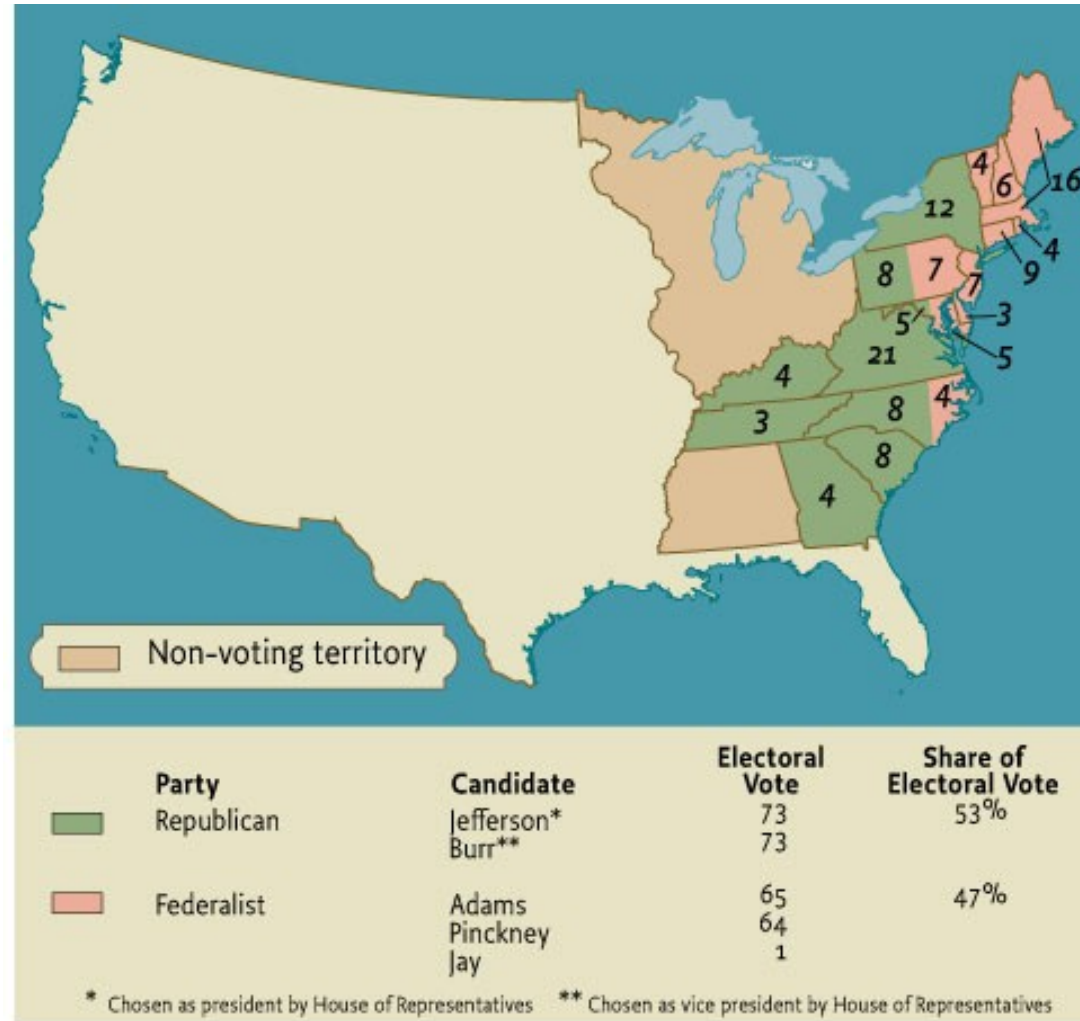


John Adams

The Alien and Sedition Acts (1798)

- A responses to crises at home and abroad during John Adams' presidency
- The Alien Act allowed the deportation of “dangerous” foreigners.
- The Sedition Act made it a crime to publish “false, scandalous, and malicious writing” against the government.
 - Vague and open to interpretation.
 - Intended to target the Republican press.
 - Similar to English common law concept of “seditious libel”
- Republicans vigorously opposed the acts.
 - Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions
 - Asserted a “right” to publish without punishment.
 - Suggested that the states had a say on the constitutionality of laws.

The “Revolution” of 1800



President Jefferson

- Jefferson promised to repeal most Federalist policies.

- Ideals

- Small government
- Unrestricted trade
- Freedom of religion and press
- Friendship with all nations

- Actions

- Repealed some Federalist policies.
 - Pardoned those convicted under the Sedition Act.
 - Reduced the size of the federal government (the military).
 - Abolished all federal taxes except the tariff.
- Retained some Federalist policies.
 - The Bank of the US
 - Hamilton's debt scheme